

NUJ submission to the College of Policing's media and communications consultation

December 2025

About the NUJ

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 22,000 members working in newspapers, news agencies, digital media, magazines, book publishing, public relations, photography, videography and broadcasting.

The NUJ represents numerous journalists across England and Wales, including many who work as freelancers such as photographers and videographers.

The union engages with numerous police bodies, including the National Police Chiefs' Council, The London Metropolitan Police, Avon and Somerset Police, Northumbria Police, as well as the College of Policing itself. The NUJ also helped establish the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists.

The NUJ aims to foster a mutual professional understanding between journalists and the police, with officers upholding the right of bona fide newsgatherers to report so that members can do their job and earn a living. In the context of such recognition, we strongly make the case for police officers to facilitate and protect the safety of journalists, to the full extent that is possible in circumstances in which such bona-fide journalists do not impede the police in the course of their duties. To this effect, the NUJ has organised visits to the Metropolitan Police Specialist Training Centre, including one very recently, for members to observe police public order training and to engage with police officers in the process of that training.

The NUJ is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and is not affiliated to any political party.

What (if anything) do you think should be changed in the APP?

In October the union welcomed the introduction of a dedicated Journalist Safety Liaison Officer (JSLO) in every force as a form of practical support to journalists facing abuse or threats of violence. Section 5.11 ('Journalist safety') rightly highlights the JSLO initiative but could be expanded to include information on police plans to protect journalists from online abuse, harassment, and threats. In recent years NUJ members have reported rising levels of online and in-person abuse – including death threats, doxxing, trolling, and stalking. This is disproportionately targeted against women journalists and Black journalists, who too often face misogynist, racist, graphic and violent abuse.

Journalists must be able to operate freely from threats and violence. The NUJ meets police forces to discuss how public order issues impact journalists' ability to report. For

example, over the summer the NUJ met senior officers of the London Metropolitan Police to discuss a demonstration on 28 June by the Football Lads Against Grooming Gangs after associates of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (A.K.A. Tommy Robinson) pushed aside photographers covering hearings outside Westminster Magistrates Court. Officers gave a clear commitment that the police would intervene if they witnessed stewards or demonstrators obstructing journalists in the course of their professional duty. The NUJ appreciates the clear statement in the Authorised Professional Practice (APP) that the media should not be prevented from reporting or filming from a public place. It would be worth also reiterating the specific commitment that officers will intervene in cases of obstruction by stewards or demonstrators as part of the general guidance on upholding media access and protecting journalists covering public order situations.

What (if anything) do you think should be removed from the APP?

What impact do you think the APP could have on the police service? This could be positive or negative and could include for example, how you feel the APP affects public trust, day to day policing activities and/ or policing practices and outcomes.

The NUJ welcomes the emphasis on protecting journalists as well as the guiding principles of transparency, accuracy and proactively addressing disinformation. As a gatekeeper of the UK Press Card Authority (UKPCA), the union notes the APP's clear recognition and guidance relating to the UK press card, as issued by the UKPCA gatekeepers, as the primary initial mechanism to identify a person as a bona-fide newsgatherer. This in turn provides the circumstances that enable and encourage regular, meaningful engagement between police officers and bona fide journalists in situations relating to public order or the presence of criminal activity. We welcome the differentiation between 'accredited journalists' and those who gather material for reasons other than professional reporting.

Based on the contents of the APP, do you think there may be impacts on protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010?

The NUJ is deeply concerned that early identification of the immigration status and nationality of suspects could lead to significant and needless vilification and amplification of prejudice. It is in such potential circumstances that rational, responsible, and impartial journalism can, at best, be marginalised and, at worst, become impossible.

The NUJ's Code of Conduct commits members to "produce no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation."

The union recognises, however, that there may be occasions where inaccurate or inflammatory reporting on social media, or community tensions may justify the release of such information, and its reporting. Where this is deemed necessary, it should only be

based on meeting a clear and pre-existing set of criteria that are considered in a documented process, with the decision taken by the relevant Gold commander. Such an approach would make such statements both more robust, and their reporting justified.

If you have any additional comments on the APP, please provide them below. (Please avoid providing comments already detailed earlier in the survey.)

The NUJ suggests explicitly acknowledging journalists' general right to protect their sources and journalistic materials, as enshrined in law, in the APP. NUJ members have been alarmed at the increasing use of the Terrorism Act to detain and compel journalists. We note also that several high-profile cases have been abandoned, after a journalists' free movement has been restricted, and in one high profile case was dismissed in court. We note also several cases in which journalists' professional equipment has been needlessly confiscated and retained as 'evidence' to the considerable inconvenience and detriment of journalists concerned.

All these incidents undermine public trust, press freedom, journalists' safety and the right to report. Journalists are not, without a specific court order, obliged to grant access to their materials and footage. Including this in the guidance would improve transparency and accountability, potentially leading to fewer wrongful detentions and allowing journalists to undertake their professional duty without obstruction.

The NUJ also notes the ruling by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) in September 2024 not to uphold a complaint against the Nottingham Post by Nottinghamshire police after the paper printed details from a non-disclosure police briefing relating to the fatal stabbings of three people in June 2023. The information printed was firmly in the public interest and the NUJ seeks clarity on how the APP seeks to avoid similar attempts to curtail media freedom through non-disclosure agreements.